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Spring 2-1-2019

LIT 110L.05: Introduction to Literature

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Recommended Citation

Browning, Robert, "LIT 110L.05: Introduction to Literature" (2019). *Syllabi*. 9659.
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Intro to Lit: the Literary Imagination (LIT 110) | Spring 2019

Rob Browning (instructor)

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Office Hours: (LA 217) MW: 10:00-11:00 & 12:00-1:00; F: 10:00-11:00 & by appointment

"What an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles. But one glance at it and you're inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, an author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time."

-- Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, Part 11: "The Persistence of Memory" (1980)

"When you read a great book, you don't escape from life, you plunge deeper into it. There may be a superficial escape – into different countries, mores, speech patterns – but what you are essentially doing is furthering your understanding of life's subtleties, paradoxes, joys, pains and truths. Reading and life are not separate but symbiotic."

-- Julian Barnes, *A Life with Books* (2012)

"The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary. Having that real though limited power to put established institutions into question, imaginative literature has also the responsibility of power. The storyteller is the truth teller."

-- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind* (2004)

Course description: This course is about the enjoyments and challenges of studying literature, with the primary goal of helping you to read with greater understanding and appreciation. Our focus throughout the semester will be the question of how interpretation works: in short, what makes a given literary text meaningful and (quite possibly) interesting? How should a text's genre—its adherence to the conventions of drama, epic poetry, or fiction—affect the way we go about making sense of it? What do the most basic elements of literature (diction, figurative language, voice, sound, and structure) contribute to a text's potential meanings? How do personal experiences and perspectives affect what each of us sees in a text and the ways we each interpret what we see? Discussion and writing are two of the most effective ways we have for thinking through our engagements with texts, ideas, and the world beyond ourselves. For this reason, LIT 110 is both discussion-oriented and writing-intensive. The course will provide guidance through the process of writing clear, interesting, and illuminating essays about literature.

Required texts:

- William Shakespeare. *Henry V* (Penguin), ISBN: 9780140714586 or 9780143130246
- John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (any edition that retains Milton's original language is fine)
- Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Penguin), ISBN: 9780141439495
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (Scribner), ISBN: 9781416556961
- Readings on Moodle (see class schedule)

I encourage you to acquire hard copies of the required texts simply because a book made out of paper can enable you to annotate a text easily and in lots of different ways. If you use

electronic editions, you'll need to establish a method for taking notes on the text as you read and as we discuss particular passages in class.

Attendance: This is a course about interpreting literature, and it would be a disservice to reduce this kind of pursuit merely to the kinds of tasks that can be evaluated with numerical scores. Most of the value of what we do on a daily basis in class can't be graded. For this reason, your attendance is essential to completing this course. I notice and wonder what's up when you're not in class. If you have met with an unusual circumstance, please do not hesitate to let me know. Barring unusual circumstances, however, each class you miss beyond four will lower your final grade by one third of a letter grade. **It is not possible to pass this course with absences beyond seven.**

Graded work: (percent of final grade)

Response papers -----	40%
Formal essays -----	50%
Your contributions to our efforts to make sense of the readings -----	10%

Note on grading: All written assignments must be completed to earn a final grade of "C" or higher. In order to earn a final grade of "B-" or "A-" or higher (respectively), at least one of your formal essays must earn a grade at that grade level. In other words, to earn a final grade of B-, B, or B+, you must earn a grade of "B-" or higher on one of your formal essays.

Response papers: These are informal, one page (single-spaced) explorations of some aspect of a text we have read recently. A total of four are required. You should use these papers as an aid to your reading (one typically thinks differently when writing about literature than when reading only) and as a forum for generating interesting questions and topics, which you might raise in class discussion or which you might pursue in either of your two formal papers. For one or two of these papers I may suggest specific topics or questions you can address, but you'll always have the option deciding your own focus for each paper.

Formal essay and term paper: Each of these essays is to be a thesis-driven, analytical discussion of a well-defined topic that concerns one of the literary texts we have studied. To earn a passing grade your essay will need to have: 1) a strong thesis; 2) convincing textual support for your main interpretive claims about the literature; 3) paragraphs that are conceptually well-developed and coherent; and 4) writing that is consistently clear and easy to understand. For the term paper, you will need to discuss your own ideas in relation to what others have said (in peer-reviewed sources) about the literary text that is your focus.

Contributions to class discussions: Exploring literature in the company of other readers is an opportunity to learn about the texts in ways that we never could as solitary individuals. Our classes will be successful to the extent that each of you keeps up with the readings and contributes to our discussions.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a violation of scholarly trust. According to the Provost, "Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#). Violators of the Student Conduct Code will receive an "F" for the offending paper. Each essay you submit must be signed at the bottom of the last page, assuring that the work is your own, except where indicated by proper documentation. Your signature is your word that the essay is free of plagiarism.

Accommodation: The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through

collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Specific objectives of the course:

1. To develop your understanding and appreciation for several truly amazing works of literature.
2. To learn the distinguishing characteristics of the major literary genres (poetry, drama, fiction) and to interpret specific examples in light of these characteristics.
3. To practice performing insightful, interesting close readings of literary texts.
4. To engage thoughtfully with a range of different perspectives concerning the central ideas and aesthetic characteristics of a literary text.
5. To learn the conventions of formatting an essay and documenting secondary sources.
6. To become proficient in writing rhetorically effective essays (well-reasoned and grammatically sound), driven by a thesis and sustained by an organized, coherent argument.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

"The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter--it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." --Mark Twain

"Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary." --Khalil Gibran

Words: You should take it upon yourself to learn each word that's new to you in the literature we read. Keep a dictionary by your side as you read (most dictionaries, including dictionary.com, are perfectly fine).

Moodle: This is where I'll post copies of short texts we'll be reading (or links to these); assignment sheets; slides I have used in class; and links to useful or interesting internet sites.

According to the pace of our discussions, we'll deviate from the following schedule from time to time. At the start or end of each class I'll confirm the assignment for the next class. It's important that you exchange contact information with one of your classmates so that, if you miss a class, you can get in touch with that person to learn if there have been any changes to the schedule.

1/11 Fri. Introductions; John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

1/14 Mon. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan"

1/16 Weds. Shakespeare: the history, the cultural phenomenon; *Henry V* (c. 1599), act one.

1/18 Fri. *Henry V*

1/21 Mon. **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - no class**

1/23 Weds. *Henry V*

1/25 Fri. *Henry V*

1/28 Mon. *Henry V*

1/30 Weds. *Henry V*

2/1 Fri. *Henry V*

2/4 Mon. **1st response paper due.** Kenneth Branagh's film *Henry V* (1989)

2/6 Weds. Branagh's *Henry V*

2/8 Fri. Discussion of the film.

- 2/11 Mon. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), book one, lines 1-126
 2/13 Weds. *Paradise Lost*
 2/15 Fri. *Paradise Lost*
- 2/18 Mon. **Presidents' Day - no class**
 2/20 Weds. *Paradise Lost*
 2/22 Fri. **2nd response paper due.** *Paradise Lost*
- 2/25 Mon. *Paradise Lost*
 2/27 Weds. Thesis writing workshop
 3/1 Fri. Office hours 9:00-12:00 (no class meeting)
- 3/4 Mon. **First formal essay due.** Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal" (1731) (on Moodle)
 3/6 Weds. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/35), overview of parts 1-2; read Part 3, chapters 1-2.
 3/8 Fri. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 3, chapters 3-5.
- 3/11 Mon. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 4, chapters 1-4
 3/13 Weds. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 4, chapters 5-8
 3/15 Fri. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 4, chapters 9-12
- 3/18 Mon. E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (1909) (Moodle)
 3/20 Weds. Selections from Plato's *The Republic* (c. 380 B.C.E.) (Moodle)
 3/22 Fri. **3rd response paper due.** Discussion of Plato and "The Machine Stops"
- 3/25-29 **Spring break - no classes**
- 4/1 Mon. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" (Moodle) and *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), chapters 1-3.
 4/3 Weds. *The Lathe of Heaven*
 4/5 Fri. *The Lathe of Heaven*
- 4/8 Mon. *The Lathe of Heaven*
 4/10 Weds. **4th response paper due.** James Tiptree, Jr. (a.k.a., Alice B. Sheldon), "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side" (1972) (Moodle)
 4/12 Fri. Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (1983) (Moodle)
- 4/15 Mon. Charles Stross, "Rogue Farm" (2003) (Moodle)
 4/17 Weds. Methods for finding peer-reviewed secondary sources
 4/19 Fri. Final essay workshop
- 4/22 Mon. Documenting sources
 4/24 Weds. Extra office hour during class time (no class meeting)
 4/26 Fri. Conclusions and extrapolations

Term paper:

- Due for section 03 (9 A.M. class time) on April 30 (Tuesday) by 3:00.
- Due for section 05 (11 A.M. class time) on May 2 (Thursday) by 3:00.

Please slide your essay under my office door (LA 217), rather than use my department mailbox

There is no final exam for this class.